DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 534 EC 180 270

TITLE	Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation: Making It Work. An Overview of the Nebraska Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System.
INSTITUTION	Nebraska State Dept. of Education, Lincoln. Special Education Section.
PUB DATE	10 Oct 83
NOTE	7p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; *Special Education; State Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Nebraska

ABSTRACT

The paper presents information in a question and answer format about the evaluation of special education program effectiveness. A seven-step process used in Nebraska is presented: (1) evaluation preview, (2) outline of evaluation questions, (3) information collection plan, (4) analysis and interpretation plan, (5) report plan, (6) management plan, and (7) plan to evaluate the evaluation. The paper covers such aspects as the scope of evaluation, ways to prevent personal bias in evaluation, development of appropriate criteria, rationale for the evaluation process, the philosophy behind Nebraska's special education program effectiveness evaluation system, results of the process, and its relationship to compliance monitoring and other forms of evaluation. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation: Making it Work

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

An overview of the Nebraska Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System

ED259534

What is evaluation?

What is the Nebraska Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System?

How is the system being developed?

What happens as a result of the evaluation?

How can we get help?

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Peter D. Biaggio
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Nebraska Department of Education
Special Education Branch
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

EC180270

Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation:

MAKING IT WORK

1. **What is meant by evaluation?**

Evaluation is a process of asking questions, seeking answers, and relating the answers to value criteria. Human beings are evaluators. It's our nature. Here are some examples of evaluations:

"How'd you like the movie? The photography was great, but there wasn't much of a plot."

"I don't like any of the candidates for mayor."

"Country and western music is good; so are classical and jazz."

"He's too aggressive." "She's too fat." "My kids are enthusiastic; yours are noisy brats." "My porridge is too hot!" "I like. . ." "I hate. . ."

2. **Should those comments be considered evaluation? Most of them are just unsupported personal opinions, aren't they?**

While not "good evaluation," those unsupported personal opinions are evaluative statements of the sort that we make every day. When making the statements, a speaker might think he/she is evaluating; however, the statements do a much better job of disclosing personal biases than of evaluating the objects. Just stating the unsupported opinions isn't good evaluation, but such primitive evaluation goes on all the time.

3. **How can people be kept from inserting their personal biases into evaluation?**

Bias can be countered by establishing good criteria for evaluation. Evaluation should be about the "objects" of the evaluation, not about the biases of the evaluator. Yet there is still a chance that someone is going to make important decisions based primarily on his or her biases about education.

Bias can't be avoided entirely. Human beings are continually, often unconsciously, and always subjectively, evaluating what goes on around us. Formal evaluation is used to counter such biases, to serve as a check and balance upon primitive valuing. Formal evaluation processes attempt to establish less biased procedures and use appropriate criteria.

4. **Where do appropriate criteria come from?**

Criteria emerge from people: the people served by a program, the people who operate it, the people who support it financially, the people who do research about the educational practices and principles involved, the people concerned with political and practical financial realities. For example, if we are evaluating a special education program in a local school district, the criteria will evolve through discussions with teachers, parents, students, administrators, and anyone else with a legitimate interest in the program.

Good evaluation revolves around people. Their biases must be identified, integrated, and artfully synthesized to become the criteria of value in an evaluation. Good evaluators identify individual biases and integrate them into shared values whenever possible and into balances among competing values whenever necessary. Evaluation is a process of asking questions, then seeking answers and relating the answers to value criteria of the people involved.

5. **Why go through an elaborate evaluation process? Don't educators know what things are working without doing all that?**

Educators know intuitively how things are working but only when they are directly involved. Individual educators don't know about many things that are going on in a district so no one has a very complete perspective. Besides, there are self-interest biases and honest differences of opinion about what is important or valuable. Working through the steps in the evaluation design process helps people in a district to work through some of those problems.

6. **What is the Nebraska Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System?**

It is a system that is being developed by the Special Education Branch of the Nebraska Department of Education with the cooperation of local school personnel. Its major purpose is to improve the educational services provided to handicapped children.

7. **What is the philosophy of the establishment of this evaluation system?**

There is a need for efficiency and consistency in evaluation. Evaluations are conducted best by local education agency personnel. Therefore, evaluations of programs and services must be useful to the local school personnel who will implement them. The results of the evaluations must answer questions and concerns that are foremost in the minds of local service providers.

Evaluation moves a step beyond the minimal requirements of other evaluation systems in an effort to help improve the programs and services for the ultimate benefit of the children.

Evaluation is also a universal function which educators on all levels must conduct. Because education is a societal concern and supported by tax dollars, the work that educators perform is the concern of many people. The results of evaluations subsequently must also be usable by state and federal legislators, state and local administrators and local boards of education.

8. **How is the Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System being developed?**

Staff from the Nebraska Department of Education, the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University and the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center at Drake University are working with personnel from several school districts to develop the evaluation systems and procedures. As evaluation projects are completed and the system is refined, more school districts will be encouraged to use the evaluation techniques.

9. What will be evaluated by the Special Education Program Effectiveness Evaluation System?

All aspects of special education programs and services are within the realm of this evaluation system, including such components as: administration, student services, curriculum, interaction with consumers and interagency coordination. Inputs, processes, and outputs relative to each of the program components may be included in the evaluation.

The specific objects to be evaluated will be identified through the evaluation design process at the local level. However, any or all aspects of special education are within the target of this evaluation system.

10. What happens as a result of evaluation?

There must be consequences to evaluation. It is not enough to learn how well programs are operating or that specific concerns exist. Evaluation results provide a foundation upon which administrators and other decision-makers can assess the current situation and make sound decisions regarding the improvement of special education programs and services. The evaluation serves as the preliminary step in formulating a plan of action to improve.

11. How does Program Effectiveness Evaluation relate to compliance monitoring and other forms of evaluation?

Local education agencies will always be expected to comply with state and federal laws governing special education. There are also certain criteria to be met for state approval and accreditation, as well as criteria established for member schools of the North Central Association.

12. What is the role of the NDE Special Education Branch in Program Effectiveness Evaluation?

The NDE Special Education staff will serve as facilitators to school districts and other agencies in assisting with program effectiveness evaluation strategies.

13. How can local school districts get help from staff of the NDE Special Education Branch?

For information on how the Special Education Branch can work with your school district, write to the Special Education Branch, Nebraska Department of Education, 301 Centennial Mall South, P.O. Box 94987, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509 or call (402) 471-2471.

THE SEVEN-STEP EVALUATION DESIGN PROCESS

Step 1. **EVALUATION PREVIEW** -- provides answers to these questions:

Why will the evaluation be done? (Purposes)
For whom will it be done? (Audiences)
What will be evaluated? (Objects)
What constraints are known?

Step 2. **OUTLINE OF EVALUATION QUESTIONS** -- provides answers to this question:

What questions and subquestions will the evaluation address for each audience?

Step 3. **INFORMATION COLLECTION PLAN** -- provides answers to these questions:

What sources of information will be used?
How will the information be collected?

Step 4. **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION PLAN** -- provides answers to these questions:

How will the information be analyzed?
What criteria will be used to judge the object?
what procedures will be used to make those judgments?

Step 5. **REPORT PLAN** -- provides answers to these questions:

What reports will be made?
What should their contents be?
When will they be given?
To whom will they be made?
What format will be used for them?

Step 6. **MANAGEMENT PLAN** -- provides answers to these questions:

What tasks need to be accomplished?
Who will do them?
When will they be done?
What resources will be needed to do them?

Step 7. **PLAN TO EVALUATE THE EVALUATION** -- provides answers to these questions:

How will you check your design?
How will you know if it's going O.K.?
What can you use to judge the overall evaluation effort?

from "Program Evaluation: A Practitioner's Guide for Trainers and Educators" prepared by Brinkerhoff, Brethower, Hluchyj and Nowakowski, 1983.

A Suggested Seven-Step Evaluation

Design Process Model

An evaluation design is a conceptual and procedural map to follow in determining the effectiveness of programs and/or services.

The Seven-Step Evaluation Design Process developed by Brinkerhoff, Brethower, Hluchyj and Nowakowski (1983) includes seven parts which they contend are included in any evaluation design. The seven parts may not always be produced in the order shown. Emergent and more naturalistic evaluations employ a different order, and some evaluations go through several cycles of some of these steps.

In Step 1, Evaluation Preview, the evaluation design begins with a description of the object (e.g. programs or services) about which an audience has an interest. There must be a purpose for doing the evaluation. A timeline and constraints or conditions under which the evaluation will take place must also be identified.

In Step 2, the Outline of Evaluation Questions, the evaluator works with audiences and descriptions of the object to decide just what questions the evaluation should address in order to meet its purpose(s).

In Step 3, the Information Collection Plan, information about the object's context and performance will be collected to meet the audience's needs and interests.

In Step 4, Analysis and Interpretation Plan, information will be processed and compared against expectations, values, criteria, and other referents in order to weigh its meaning.

In Step 5, the Report Plan, the evaluator keeps key audiences informed about the evaluation's intentions, progress and results, and works with them to help understand its implications.

In Step 6, The Management Plan, the evaluators and others think through who will do what, when, where, how and with what resources in order to make the evaluation work well.

In Step 7, the Plan to Evaluate the Evaluation, the evaluation's design, progress and results are investigated to help revise them and determine how well they are working.